

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. A system for transmitting a document from a first location to a second location through a disinterested third location, said system comprising:

means for selecting said third location discrete from said first

5 location and said second location, said third location being associated with a party disinterested in said transmitted document;

means at least in part operable at said first location for transmitting a document to said third location;

10 means at least in part operable at said third location for receiving said document transmitted by said transmitting means, wherein said received document is in electronic form after receipt at said third location;

means at least in part operable at said third location for producing a confirmation of receipt of said received electronic document; and

15 means at least in part operable at said third location for reproducing for delivery to said second location said received electronic document in a plurality of different formats.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein said transmission means comprises:

means for time stamping said transmitted document according to a secure real time clock in communication with said transmitting means.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein said receiving means comprises:

means for accepting documents transmitted in humanly readable tangible form; and

5 means for accepting documents transmitted in machine readable electronic form.

4. The system of claim 3, wherein said received document is selected from the group consisting of:

- a printed document;
- a FAX transmission; and
- an e-mail transmission.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein said transmitting means is selected from the group consisting of:

- a general purpose computer operating under control of a general purpose electronic mail application;
- a general purpose computer operating in combination with an intermediary communication server;
- a general purpose computer operating under control of a special purpose application adapted specifically for said system; and
- a facsimile transmission device.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein said transmitting means further comprises means for communicating additional information with said transmitted document.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein said additional information comprises an indication of payment for the service of transmitting said document.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein said confirmation producing means is inoperable until said indication of payment is validated.

9. The system of claim 7, wherein said indication of payment is an indicia of pre-payment deducted from a credit storage device coupled to

said transmitting means, said indicia being transmitted to said receiving means accompanying said transmitted document.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein said credit storage device includes an internal time device and said transmitted document includes time information provided by said internal time device.

11. The system of claim 7, wherein said indication of payment is authorization to fund the transmission from an account established external to said transmitting means.

12. The system of claim 6, wherein said additional information comprises instructions regarding the delivery of said transmitted document to said second location.

13. The system of claim 6, wherein said additional information comprises instructions regarding storage of a copy of said transmitted document by said receiving means.

14. The system of claim 1, wherein said reproducing means comprises:

means for formatting said received document according to a predetermined protocol for delivery to said second location.

15. The system of claim 1, wherein said reproducing means comprises:

means for reproducing said received document as a physical document to be physically delivered to said second location; and

5 means for reproducing said received document as a properly formatted electronic document to be electronically delivered to said second location.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein said electronic document reproduced as a physical document is delivered to said second location through said disinterested party's established predefined routes for document delivery.

17. The system of claim 1, wherein said reproducing means comprises a document printer operating under control of said disinterested party.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein said document printer is disposed at a location other than said second location and wherein delivery of said transmitted document includes physical handling of said reproduced document by said disinterested party.

505 B2> 19. The system of claim 18, wherein said reproducing means further comprises means for reproducing an indicia of authorization to deliver said transmitted document to said second location by said disinterested party.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein said indicia comprises a postage meter stamp.

21. The system of claim 18, wherein said receiving means further comprises:

means for determining an address of said second location from information transmitted by said transmitting means.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein said reproducing means further comprises:

means for preparing a delivery container suitable for use in delivering said transmitted document, said prepared delivery container including said determined address.

23. The system of claim 17, wherein said document printer is disposed at said second location.

24. The system of claim 1, wherein said reproducing means comprises:

means for determining a particular method of delivery of said received document to said second location; and

means for reproducing said received document according to said determination made by said determining means.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein said determining means comprises a database of preferred delivery methods.

26. The system of claim 1, further comprising:

means operable at least in part at said third location for sorting a plurality of transmitted documents, including said transmitted document according to a criteria selected from the group consisting of a delivery route, a recipient, a class of delivery and a sender.

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27. A system for transmitting a document from a first location to a second location through a disinterested third location, said system comprising:

5 means for selecting said third location discrete from said first location and said second location, said third location being associated with a party disinterested in said transmitted document;

means at least in part operable at said first location for transmitting a document and authentication information to said third location;

10 means at least in part operable at said third location for receiving said document and authentication information transmitted by said transmitting means, wherein said received document is in electronic form after receipt at said third location;

15 means operable at least in part at said third location for identifying a sender of said transmitted document through reference to said authentication information; and

means at least in part operable at said third location for reproducing for delivery to said second location said received electronic document in a plurality of different formats.

28. The system of claim 27, wherein pre-payment for transmission of said transmitted document is verified through reference to said authentication information.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein said pre-payment is deducted from a credit register stored at said first location.

30. The system of claim 28, wherein said pre-payment is deducted from a credit balance stored at said third location.

31. The system of claim 27, wherein payment for transmission of said transmitted document is accounted for through reference to said authentication information.

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32. A method for dispatching a document from a sender to a selected receiver, said method comprising the steps of:
- transmitting said document from said sender; and
  - receiving said document transmitted by said transmitting step at a way location, wherein receipt of said electronic document at said way location includes the substeps of:
- reproducing said received document according to a selected format to be delivered to said receiver;
  - verifying an indication of pre-payment for said document transmission; and
  - producing a confirmation of receipt of said received electronic document.
33. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of: time stamping transmission of said document.
34. The method of claim 32, wherein said receiving step provides the ability to receive a document transmitted by a plurality of different transmitting devices having different communication protocols.
35. The method of claim 34, wherein said transmitted document is a tangible hard copy.
36. The method of claim 34, wherein said transmitted document is an electronic transmission.
37. The method of claim 34, wherein said plurality of different transmitting devices include at least a general purpose computer and a facsimile transmission device.



38. The method of claim 32, wherein said selected format of said reproducing substep is a predefined humanly readable format.

39. The method of claim 32, wherein said selected format of said reproducing substep is a predefined electronic format.

40. The method of claim 39, wherein said preselected electronic format is a facsimile transmission.

41. The method of claim 39, wherein said preselected electronic format is an e-mail transmission.

42. The method of claim 32, wherein selected format is indicated by information transmitted with said transmitted document.

43. The method of claim 32, wherein said selected format is indicated through reference to a database.

44. The method of claim 32, wherein said transmitting step utilizes a general purpose computer operating under control of an electronic mail application.

45. The method of claim 32, wherein said transmitting step utilizes a general purpose communication device operating in combination with a communication server.

46. The method of claim 32, wherein said transmitting step utilizes a general purpose computer operating under control of a special purpose application adapted specifically for said system.

47. The method of claim 32, wherein said transmitting step utilizes a facsimile machine.

48. The method of claim 32, wherein said confirmation producing substep is not accomplished until said indication of prepayment is verified.

49. The method of claim 32, wherein said indication of prepayment is an indicia of pre-payment deducted from a credit storage device, said indicia being transmitted accompanying said transmitted document.

50. The method of claim 32, wherein said indication of prepayment is provided by a recipient of said transmitted document.

51. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of: transmitting additional information accompanying the transmission of said document.

52. The method of claim 51, wherein said additional information comprises instructions regarding the delivery of said transmitted document to said receiving location.

53. The method of claim 51, wherein said additional information comprises instructions regarding storage of a copy of said transmitted document at said way location.

54. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of: determining an address of said recipient location from information included in said electronic document.

55. The method of claim 32, wherein said way location is a physical location discrete from said sender and said receiver.

56. The method of claim 55, wherein said way location is operated under control of a delivery service disinterested in said sender and said receiver.

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57. A system for delivering information to a selected location from a transmitting location, said system comprising:

means at least in part operable at said transmitting location for transmitting said information to an intermediate location; and

5 means at least in part operable at said intermediate location for receiving said information transmitted by said transmitting means, wherein said receiving means comprises:

means for electronically receiving said transmitted information including means for converting said transmission to electronic form if said transmitted information is not initially in electronic form;

10 means for reproducing said information in human readable form, wherein said reproducing means also produces an indicia authorizing delivery of said human readable information to said selected location; and

15 means for producing an acknowledgement of receipt of said transmitted information.

58. The system of claim 57, wherein said intermediate location is selected according to proximity to said selected location.

59. The system of claim 58, wherein said intermediate location selection is accomplished automatically by said transmitting location through reference to address information with respect to said selected location.

60. The system of claim 57, wherein said intermediate location is selected according to proximity to said transmitting location.

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61. The system of claim 57, wherein said electronic receiving means comprises:

means for receiving electronic documents communicated utilizing different communication protocols.

62. The method of claim 61, wherein said different communication protocols include at least two protocols selected from the group consisting of:

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- a standardized electronic mail protocol;
  - a special purpose mail communication protocol;
  - a standardized facsimile protocol;
  - a standardized character based protocol; and
  - a standardized packet based protocol.

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63. The system of claim 57, wherein said receiving means further comprises:

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means for determining delivery address information with respect to said selected location from information contained within said transmitted information.

64. The system of claim 63, wherein said receiving means further comprises:

means for verifying the accuracy of said delivery address information.

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65. The system of claim 57, further comprising:

means for including ancillary information with said transmitted information, said ancillary information being suitable for use by said

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receiving means in delivery of said transmitted information to said selected location.

66. The system of claim 65, wherein said ancillary information comprises:

means for funding the delivery of said transmitted information.

67. The system of claim 66, wherein said acknowledgement producing means includes means for transmitting said acknowledgement to said transmitting location, wherein said last mentioned transmitting means is inactive until said funding means is confirmed.

68. The system of claim 65, wherein said funding means includes at least a value data packet.

69. The system of claim 68, wherein said value is deducted from a credit stored at said transmitting location.

70. The system of claim 65, wherein said ancillary information includes a delivery address of said selected location.

71. The system of claim 70, wherein said receiving means further comprises:

means for verifying the accuracy of said delivery address information.

72. The system of claim 65, wherein said ancillary information includes a time of transmission of said document by said transmitting

means, said time being provided by a secure time piece disposed at said transmitting location.

73. The system of claim 65, wherein said ancillary information includes specific delivery information regarding the delivery of said human readable information, indicating selection of at least one delivery option of a plurality of delivery options available for delivery of said transmitted information.

74. The system of claim 57, wherein said reproducing means is operable at least in part at said selected location.

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75. A system for transmitting a document from a first location for delivery to a second location, said system comprising:

means for selecting a third location discrete from said first location and said second location, said selection being based at least in part on a relative position of said third location to one of said first and said second locations;

means at least in part operable at said first location for transmitting a document to said third location, said transmitting means also transmitting information with respect to a value for delivery of said document; and

means at least in part operable at said third location for receiving said document transmitted by said transmitting means, wherein said receiving means includes:

means for receiving electronic document transmissions;

means for reproducing said received document as a physical document and an electronic document to be delivered to said second location; and

means for producing and transmitting a confirmation of receipt of said received electronic document to said first location.

76. The system of claim 75, wherein said confirmation includes information selected from the group consisting of:

document transmission information;

document sender information; and

document recipient information.

77. The system of claim 75, wherein said receiving means is adapted to receive documents transmitted from a general purpose computer, an electronic mail system, and a facsimile machine.



78. The system of claim 75, wherein said transmission of said confirmation is accomplished subsequent to verification of said value information.

79. The system of claim 75, wherein said value information includes an indicia of credit deducted from a credit storage device coupled to said transmitting means.

80. The system of claim 79, wherein said credit storage device includes a real time clock and said transmission of said document is time stamped according to said real time clock.

81. The system of claim 75, further comprising:  
means for archiving said electronic document at said third location.

82. The system of claim 75, wherein said receiving means further comprises means for determining a physical location of said second location.

83. The system of claim 82, wherein said reproduction means further comprises means for preparing a delivery container suitable for use in delivering said reproduced document, said prepared delivery container including said determined address.

84. The system of claim 75, wherein said transmitting means and said receiving means communicate at least in part through a public communication network.

85. The system of claim 84, wherein said communication network is selected from the group consisting of:

a public switched network;  
the Internet;  
a computer network, and  
a cable system.

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